

GERMAN RAID

Night November 2-3, 1917.

Report by Brig. General James W. McAndrew,
 Army Schools,
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 Training Section,
 in compliance with paragraph 16, S. O. 148,
 Hq. A.E.F., November 5, 1917.

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1. The facts are about as follows:

2. THE ENEMY

PREPARATIONS. The Germans began preparations for the raid several weeks, perhaps three months, before it took place. Its purpose seems to have been to determine definitely when and where American troops had gone into the line. The participants were carefully selected attack troops, four-fifths volunteers. Their numbers were between 210 and 250 men, with five officers. The Germans prepared model trenches like those to be raided and carefully and repeatedly rehearsed the operation. It was postponed from time to time until German observers had twice reported the appearance of Americans on heights back of the French lines. (These are said to have been mounted parties of Artillery men). German patrols made themselves entirely familiar with the ground to be traversed. The night of the raid, the hostile patrols worked close to the American wire on both sides of the Artois salient without disturbance from the garrison beyond a little ineffective fire from our advanced posts. These patrols placed sections of pipe, filled with explosive, under the north, east and south wire, apparently to be fired later during the bombardment. One of these failing to explode, they cut through the wire by hand. Tape was laid to guide the main body. Telephone connection was maintained with the German line. When all was ready, the Artillery was telephoned to commence firing.

BARRAGE. A barrage was put down not only on the Artois salient, which was to be raided, but also on the adjacent centers of resistance, Aéro and Yser. A German deserter reports 16 batteries engaged. On the Artois salient, the bombardment was as follows: A very accurate and destructive fire of 100's and 155's using high explosives on the north trench (Boyou Nord - sketch herewith) from P.3. to beyond the company post of command (P.C.Co.). Boyau Nord is the trench ordinarily used by the garrison for communication and connection. A lighter but still effective fire of the same character on Bayou Sud. A very heavy fire of 77's on Est. trench, using both shrapnel

and high explosive, calculated to compel the garrison to take to their dugouts by a rain of fragments but without doing much material damage to the trench (Est) to be cleaned up. The trenches west of and parallel to Est were also placed under heavy fire. After perhaps twenty minutes of this fire, the barrage lifted from Est to between Raffin and Pin trenches, continuing on Boyaus Nord and Sud west of Raffin.

The main body of the raiding party had meantime marched, probably by the route indicated on the sketch, in close double column of files up to the wire at A. Entering by the breach thereat, flanking groups of five to ten men each were sent east and west, presumably to block the communicating trenches against reinforcements. The main body moved rapidly along the top of the ground on the east side of Est trench, drove off part of its garrison, killed two men and captured the remainder. The bulk of the Germans then promptly retreated by the gap at A. They were probably not in our trenches more than 10 minutes. Some seem to have gone out by the gaps in the wire to the south and east and some may have entered that way. The party reassembled at Rechicourt. The Germans probably suffered little or no loss, beyond one wounded deserter - wounded by their own artillery fire.

3. AMERICAN TROOPS.

CHARACTER OF DEFENSE. This portion of the French first line consists of detached centers of resistance, each generally garrisoned by one company reinforced by machine gun sections. Gaps between these centers of resistance are protected by continuous wire and patrols.

DISPOSITIONS OF BATTALION. The 2nd Battalion, 16th Infantry, entered the first line system of trenches about 5:30 P.M., November 2. A French company remained at Yser, Company F took the Artois center; Company E, the Aero center; the third company in reserve at Barthelémont.

DISPOSITIONS COMPANY F. The Artois salient is prepared chiefly for defense towards the north and east; it was contemplated that the French company at Yser would protect the south flank of the salient. Company F placed three platoons in the first line, and one in support at the ravine of Cretes. The First Platoon was to defend the Est trench; the Second and Third Platoons Boyau Nord. The First Platoon had posts, each of five men, in a former first line trench close to the wire and as indicated on the sketch (P₁P₂P₃). To the west, the platoon's sector included Boyaus Nord and Sud nearly to Raffin trench. Est trench appears to have been garrisoned by some twenty men divided into three nearly equal groups separated from each other by considerable distances. The remainder of the platoon were in small posts to cover the north face of the area allotted to the First Platoon. Company F completed the relief of the French company in the Artois salient shortly before 10:00 P.M., November 2. In taking over the trench, it made its dispositions identical with those of the company relieved.

RECONNAISSANCE. The company officers reconnoitred the positions to be occupied on November 1 or 2. Each platoon commander seems to have been accompanied in his reconnaissance

by one of his sergeants. The reconnaissance does not appear to have been a very thorough one.

COMMAND. Major Burnett, commanding the American battalion, was not to take over the command of the sector occupied by his troops until 6 A.M. of the 5th instant. Meantime, he remained as an observer with the French major commanding the sector. The French left a lieutenant as adviser with Lieutenant Comfort who commanded Company F.

LIAISON. Company B, 16th Infantry, left this sector a few days before. Lieutenant Patterson, who had been with Company B, remained to give Company F the benefit of his knowledge of the local terrain. Communication was by telephone, runners, rockets, and pigeons. All communications, except runners, were in charge of French detachments. The telephone lines were hung on the walls of the trenches. The French also left detachments for the service of machine guns in position northwest of Co. P.C. to flank the section of Boyau Nord east of P.C. The Est trench was to be flanked by French machine guns at Yser.

WEATHER. The night of November 2-3 was dark, notwithstanding the moon, because of the heavy fog and rain.

INCIDENTS OF NIGHT. Near midnight, the extreme eastern post, No. 1, heard some one in the wire and fired in that direction. No. 4 and other posts to the west thereof also detected noises in the wire and fired. The second platoon (Lieut. Ericksen) sent up lighting rockets but these revealed nothing. The German bombardment came down about 2:50 A.M. The listening posts generally maintained their positions; the remainder of the men, under the orders of their platoon leaders, took refuge in dugouts, and sentries therefor were posted. As soon as the bombardment started, Lieutenant McLoughlin, in command of the First Platoon, visited his posts along Boyau Nord and the Posts at P¹, P², and P³. Returning through Boyau Nord, he attempted to turn into Est trench but was blown past its entrance by the explosion of a shell behind him. By this time the bombardment was at its height; Boyau Nord was rapidly being knocked to pieces under the accurate and destructive fire of the German 105's and 150's and movement therein had become almost impossible. At the same time, the German 77's were keeping Est trench under a heavy rain of shrapnel and shell fragments. About three o'clock the barrage lifted from Est trench, apparently to the westward of Raffin trench, but continued to play on Nord and Sud Boyaus west of Raffin trench and as far back as the battalion Post of Command. Lieutenant McLoughlin was in a dugout of Boyau Nord between Est and Raffin trenches with some six or seven men, one of whom was posted as a sentry at the door. As the barrage lifted, two or three men appeared close at hand moving west in Boyau Nord. The sentry, taking them for Americans, was pistoled at close quarters and killed. Lieutenant McLoughlin, followed by his men, rushed up the stairs but was struck on the helmet by a fragment of shell or grenade and knocked unconscious back down the steps. In the narrow trench, the Germans passed a second party of Americans who failed to recognize them as enemies until the Germans fired at them from behind. These Germans, assisted by others on the ground above, for a few minutes fought this American detachment and those from the dugouts near Raffin trench with

pistol and hand grenade. finally disappearing to the south. After a few minutes Lieutenant McLoughlin recovered consciousness, came out of his dugout and, moving east on Boyau Nord, found that the post at P₃ had taken shelter from the bombardment; and that P₂ and P₁ had been engaged with and had driven off a party of Germans moving above ground around these posts. In Est trench and on the ground between it and Raffin trench, Lieutenant McLoughlin found two dead Americans. The trench otherwise was empty. The Germans had driven one group of six men away from it, and had captured the twelve remaining. The main body of the Germans had evidently passed along the parapet of the trench while a small party cleaned up the dugouts below.

All telephone connection was lost immediately after the hostile bombardment started. Communication by runner along Boyaus Nord and Sud became very difficult not only because of the heavy shell fire thereon but also because of the physical difficulty of travel over the battered areas. Runners nevertheless did make their way, but slowly.

DEFENSIVE BARRAGE. Fearing a raid, Lieutenant Comfort, on the opening of the bombardment, tried to get the French operators to telephone a request to the French artillery for help, but was persuaded against this action by the French lieutenant on duty at the company Post of Command. Lieutenant Patterson, a short time later, tried to send up a rocket signal for barrage but was dissuaded from so doing by the French lieutenant. Lieutenant Ericksen, commanding the second platoon, made the rocket signal for barrage about fifteen minutes after the bombardment began and repeated this call ten minutes later. The French artillery saw the signal but did not respond. Major Burnett early suggested to the French major that he call for barrage but the French officer did not believe a raid was coming and declined to call. The French major began to telephone for a barrage about the time the Germans were lifting their own. By that time, the wires were broken. A light defensive barrage was finally obtained about 3:45 A. M.

CONDUCT OF OFFICERS. Lieutenant Comfort, commanding the company, Lieutenant McLoughlin, 1st Platoon, Lieutenant Ericksen, 2nd Platoon, and Lieutenant Patterson, the liaison officer from Company B, were all out in the Boyau Nord during the height of the bombardment endeavoring to retain command and control of their widely scattered groups. Lieutenant Comfort visited Est trench after the bombardment began and before the Germans came in; Major Burnett went up to Company F as soon as the firing ceased. Working over badly battered trenches and in the dark, rain and mud, great difficulty was experienced in checking up the many small groups and in determining what had occurred. Not until daylight was it evident that the Germans had raided and cleaned up Est trench.

(The foregoing statements are based upon the visit of the investigating officers November 7 to the scene of the raid, examination of the terrain, questioning on the spot of many of the participants; conversations with the French investigating officer from Headquarters 8th Army, with the Chief of Intelligence, 9th A.C., Commander 18th Division, Major Marshall, Lieut. McLoughlin, Lieut. Hugo, French major who commanded sector; consideration of reports of General Bordeaux, General Sibert, Colonel Ely, Major Marshall, Lieut. Comfort, Lieut. Ericksen, Lieut. McLoughlin; written statements

of enlisted participants and German prisoner).

4. OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS.

(a) Such a raid, elaborately prepared, made by picked troops and supported by heavy and accurately placed artillery fire, will almost certainly succeed in obtaining some prisoners.

(b) In general, the behavior of the American officers and men was very good. Considering all the circumstances, Lieuts. Comfort, McLoughlin, Erickson, and Patterson, under the most difficult conditions, displayed great courage and an earnest desire to do their full duty.

(c) The preliminary reconnaissance of the position to be occupied by Company F was not made in sufficient detail, nor were enough men in the first line platoon made familiar during daylight with the posts they were to occupy and defend.

(d) To avoid hostile observation, the relief was made at night. It would have been better for the relieving company to cross the exposed ground so as to arrive in the trenches at daybreak and so give the men the whole day to become familiar with their surroundings and rehearse their action in case of a night attack. In any case, non-commissioned officers should have been sent during the afternoon to take over all trench equipment.

(e) As will usually be the case, the division of authority in the battalion sector between French and American officers led to conflicting ideas and indecisive action. Witness the delay in calling for a defensive barrage.

(f) Telephone switchboards and operators were French, speaking a language not understood by most of the American officers using this means of communication. Misunderstandings and confusion necessarily resulted. (This difficulty, of course, is simply incident to the conditions under which the battalion was getting its training, and must be borne).

(g) No patrols were sent to the front. The ground between the opposing trenches was distinctly German ground. Our troops must make no man's land distinctly American land. The long presence of Germans about our wire and deliberate preparations for the raid would hardly have been possible if the American troops had done any patrolling. And certainly when their presence became evident, strong patrols should have been sent to drive them off instead of resting content with a little firing. (The excuses offered are not sufficient; i.e., that the French have laid many traps in front, that the difference in language would lead to the French firing into our patrols, and that the experience of previous battalions shows our patrols are likely to suffer from our own fire). The battalion is now under orders from higher authority to send out strong patrols, each of an officer and 25 men. These patrols are too large to be easily concealed and they offer a great mark for any hostile party to ambush.

(h) Extreme dispersion of units made command and co-ordinate action at night an impossibility. The Artois salient, in reality, is entirely too large for a stubborn defense by one company. The deployment for the daytime into widely separated groups minimizes losses under artillery fire and still permits a strong flanking and direct fire to be brought over the open ground in front. It is, therefore,

well adapted for the daytime defense of this extensive position. But at night the main portions of the garrison should each be concentrated. To disperse at night into these widely separated, small groups is simply to invite capture in detail by any moderately strong raiding party. Likewise, to remain below ground in dugouts or even in the trenches upon the approach of the hostile party renders each group almost helpless before an enemy who keeps the bulk of his men above ground. An attack at night above ground can best be met with the defenders above ground. Each platoon should, therefore, have been concentrated in the center of its section. Small parties, each of some three men only, should have covered the front and flanks, and these should have given warning by flare as well as by runner of the enemy's approach. While the German barrage was on Est trench, the main body of the platoon must, of course, remain in deep dugouts, but with every arrangement for prompt exit therefrom. This means sentries at the head of each stairway, at least half of the men lined up in double column of files on the steps, prepared to rush out at the first warning, and the others alert and ready to follow. The platoon leader should be at the head of the stairs carefully observing the barrage. The instant it lifted, he should give the word; his men should sprint up the stairs and out of the fire trench to the ground above and, in the case in question, behind the trench. Once there, the platoon would be able to act as a whole under the command of its officer, and could use the rifle, pistol, bayonet and grenade upon somewhat equal terms with its enemy. Even when so greatly outnumbered as in the present case, the platoon assembled on top of the ground would have a much better chance of driving off its opponent, of causing him to pay dearly for any prisoners taken, and of a successful retreat if compelled thereto.

To facilitate rapid exit, hand ropes should be placed on both sides of the dugout steps, the trenches themselves should be provided with steps or ramps, and the whole procedure drilled until every man knows exactly what he is to do.

It is, of course, true that the relief of the French company at night, followed almost immediately by the German raid, and preceded by an inadequate preliminary reconnaissance of the ground made these rather elaborate arrangements impracticable. But such elaborate arrangements must be made if raids of the sort in question are to be defeated.

(i) The security detachments in front, P₁, P₂, P₃, were unnecessarily strong as they were required only to give warning. Two posts located at P₁ and P₃ would have been sufficient in this case and the strength of each could well have been reduced to three men. The men so gained should have been added to the platoon's main body, which should do the fighting.

(j) The German artillery appears to have registered on the Artois trenches some days previously. The supporting artillery observers should have noted what the Germans were doing and warned the infantry of what to expect.

(k) Artillery assigned the duty of defensive barrage must have no discretion as to opening fire. When called for by the infantry, the barrage must be put down immediately.

The responsibility for an unnecessary barrage must rest with the infantry.

(l) On the morning of November 7, groups of several men each were found in position near the stations of the machine guns and automatic rifles. A total of four or five observation stations for the whole Artois salient would have been sufficient to give warning of any hostile movement. The men so gained should have been added to those engaged in cleaning, repairing, and draining the battered trenches. The breaches in the wire needed further repairs. A number of unused trenches should have been wired and entangled so as to forbid their use to the enemy. Ammunition, rocket, and sandbag dumps required cleaning and an orderly arrangement of contents. Details from the reserve company should have been brought up to assist in this work of repair. Dugouts should be drained, cleaned, lighted and made as comfortable as possible. While the experienced soldier endures necessary discomfort uncomplainingly, he manifests his experience by making himself comfortable under circumstances that discourage the inexperienced. Under great discomfort, the morale of troops will always be better for a reasonable amount of labor in making arrangements which tend to lessen their discomfort and to produce an air of order and discipline. Psychologically also, soldiers are much more likely to hold strongly defences which they have worked hard to place in order and which they therefore unconsciously come to regard as their own, than those in which this personal interest is lacking.

(m) Before this raid the sector had been very quiet for a long period. Everyone concerned had fallen into a sense of false security and the disbelief that the Germans had any intention of strenuous action. This tendency to become careless in quiet sectors in the measures for defense must be continually combatted.

(n) There was a lack of intelligence or discipline on the part of some artillery observers, who themselves suffered none of the evil consequences of their exposure, but who precipitated a raid on the trenches that, postponed a little, might have been better met.

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Headquarters American Expeditionary Forces, Nov. 14, 1917.

APPROVED.

By command of General Pershing:

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